
Knowing Jesus

The Birth of Christ

Micah 5:1-6; Luke 2:1-20

12/23/2018

Main Idea: The culmination of God's promised peace came through a baby born in Bethlehem.

Lesson Objective: We must choose to worship Jesus.

Introduction

As your class time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

In 1868, Bret Harte wrote a short story called “The Luck of Roaring Camp.” It turned Mr. Harte into an internationally known writer. The story was written about a mining town in California called Roaring Camp. The only woman in the town was a Cherokee named Sal. She became pregnant but died while giving birth to a son. This left a baby in a town full of single men. Not just men, but rough, tough, rude, crude men of the WILD west. What are THEY going to do with a baby?

The child was thought to be a sign of good fortune so they gave him the name Thomas Luck. They put him in a dirty box, wrapped in dirty clothes. But that didn’t look right, so they ordered a rosewood cradle with satin sheets and a soft pillow. The best room they had was filthy, so these men got on their knees and cleaned the floors and the walls. Then they decided that if they were going to take care of a baby, they needed to start using soap. They needed to wash their hands and bathe more often. And then they said, “Maybe we don’t need to be gambling so much. Maybe we don’t need to be fighting so much. Maybe we don’t need to be drinking so much. And as the story progresses, the entire town of Roaring Camp was transformed by the arrival of a single baby boy.

Two thousand years ago, the entire world was transformed by the arrival of a baby boy, only this baby boy was the Son of God. And because of Jesus’ birth, everything is different! He has made a whole new way of life possible. We can know salvation and peace and hope and love and joy through Him. Because He loves us, we can learn to love others by His example.

The Coming King

Micah 5:1-6

¹Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. ²But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. ³Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵And he shall be their peace. When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men; ⁶they shall shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances; and he shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.](#)

The context of these verses began in Micah 4:9, where the prophet Micah predicted the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonian captivity, and the eventual return of the people to the land. This prophecy states that God would bring judgment upon Israel, and they would suffer. However, God would not abandon them but He would eventually raise up another ruler to be His servant. This servant would be from David's hometown of Bethlehem Ephrathah. He would originate from antiquity (lit "from days long ago") and "ancient times." Some scholars have argued for the eternal existence of the Messiah. At the same time this passage

could have been simply foretelling of the ancient “origins” of the Messiah in the line of David (as indicated in the Davidic covenant of 2 Sam 7:12–16) and in the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10).¹

Bethlehem was situated about five miles south-southwest of Jerusalem. Compared to Jerusalem with its magnificent buildings, Bethlehem was characterized as “small” in size and significance. Yet in spite of its relative insignificance, this birthplace of David (1 Sam 16:1, 18; 17:12) would also become the birthplace of his greatest descendant, the Messiah (Matt 2:1-8). Though Bethlehem was a blip on most of Israel’s radar, it became the epicenter of God’s plan to redeem the world.

Within the Jewish writings (Targum), we know that Jewish traditions held that this passage in Micah was the prophecy that God would send His Messiah to Bethlehem. This coming Davidic ruler would appear when she who is in labor has given birth. The woman identified in giving birth could have been seen as the nation of Israel who had suffered under the hands of foreign governments. Some have seen the woman as the town of Bethlehem that suffered greatly when King Herod sent murderers throughout the town to eradicate the infant future king. Others see the woman as Mary, the mother of Jesus, who gave birth to Jesus in the most humbling circumstances.

This passage instructs us that God will send His ruler, and He will shepherd His people like His ancestor David (2Sam 5:2; 7:7), serving with the authority and strength of Yahweh. His people will live securely in His kingdom that will extend to the ends of the earth (see Ps 2:8; 72:8). He would bring God’s “wholeness” or peace (Hb shalom) with His righteous reign (Isa 9:6). The

¹ Kenneth L. Barker, [*Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*](#), vol. 20, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 97–98.

Jewish people interpreted this passage as God giving them a new ultimate king who would defeat all other nations and physically rule like David did years before. They missed out on the point that Jesus came to defeat sin and darkness that held such a strong grip on mankind. His victory would allow the other nations to be gathered once again under God's rule and care.

The ultimate fulfillment of the promise of peace will be realized in the kingdom of God. We will finally live in the safe environment that all desire but that can never be achieved by human governments or armies. In the kingdom of God we will be in our Savior's presence; we will be under His rule, and we will never experience danger or fear again. The return of Jesus is the great hope that sustains and encourages us as we face the uncertainties of daily life. What promise of hope is there in the eternal, personal relationship we will have with God the Father? How did Jesus make this possible?

How is Jesus described in these verses?

How would Jesus compare to the previous rulers of Israel?

What do these verses teach us about the divinity and eternity of Jesus?

Compare the seeming insignificance of Bethlehem with the incomparable worth of Jesus. How does God often work in surprising ways?

The Humble Beginning

Luke 2:1-7

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)

In order to appreciate what God did in the passage above, let's very briefly look at the historical setting. In the year 44BC, Julius Caesar was murdered on the floor of the Roman Senate, and his adopted son Octavian returned to Rome. Upon his return, tension grew between him and Mark Anthony, who was very outspoken about the wrongful death of Julius. The tension eventually led them to battle, but after some time the men came together and divided the Roman Empire in sections. Octavius took Rome, and Mark Anthony took Egypt. Octavius did not rest during this time of peace, but spent his time fortifying his reign over the northern part, while Mark Anthony had fallen in love with Cleopatra. Octavius saw this as an opportunity to finally rid himself of Mark Anthony. He presented evidence (actually a rumor that upon his death, Mark Anthony would give his part of the Roman Empire to his Egyptian heirs) against Mark Anthony to the Senate, and soon the two were set for an all out war.

Octavius' military abilities helped secure victory and the subsequent suicides of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra. Thus, Octavius was the lone ruler over Rome. He took the name Augustus, which indicated that the Roman gods had selected him, and that he was "superior" over all others. After some time, Augustus Octavius wanted to measure the wealth of the Roman Empire by calling the people to return to their homelands and to be registered by way of a census.

Some people have made a great fuss over the reference to Quirinius (Luke 2:2 - Cyrenius KJV). They point to the historical evidence that Quirinius could not have been the governor of Syria during the time of the census. We shouldn't spend too much time trying to discredit the references in Luke. A simple explanation could be that the census took a while to migrate to the region of Herod the Great, especially with him being at odds with Augustus (Herod was a good friend with Mark Anthony). Also there were times in history when rulers were in and out of office, and the people were not aware of the change, let alone someone memorializing the event. It could be that Quirinius served a divided term as governor, or that he was a subservient leader that most people assumed was in charge.

Inside Rome, in the Forum, the doors of the Temple of War had been closed for ten years and would remain closed for thirty more. To memorialize the peace, the famous monument *Ara Pacis Augustae* propagandizing Augustus' peace had been erected. Rome and Augustus had bludgeoned every foe into submission. There was "peace," but it was a dark peace—a Hitler's peace—and men or women or boys or girls couldn't say a word against it without fearfully looking over their shoulder. Historian John Buchan discovered that when Caesar Augustus died, men actually "comforted themselves, reflecting that Augustus was a god, and that gods do not die." So the world had at its helm a

self-proclaimed, widely accepted god and savior. Luke, the historian and theologian, wants us to see this as the tableau for understanding the coming of the real Savior. The contrast could not be greater.²

Joseph and Mary capsulized the mystery of grace—the King does not come to the proud and powerful, but to the poor and powerless. As it is so often in life, things were not as they seemed to the world around, because humble Mary and Joseph appeared to be helpless pawns caught in the movements of secular history; but every move was under the hand of Almighty God. The Messiah would indeed be born in tiny, insignificant Bethlehem! The baby Mary carried was not a Caesar, a man who would become a god, but a far greater wonder—the true God who had become a man!

As with his other writings, Luke gives the historical setting of the birth of Jesus. What implications does this setting suggest about the world into which Jesus came?

What does the local setting of Jesus' birth tell us about the way He entered our world?

When did you first sense that Jesus wanted to enter and reign “your world”?

Verse 7 says there was “no room for them in the inn.” While this is certainly a historical event, how does it also serve as a metaphor for what happens with people's rejection of Jesus today?

² R. Kent Hughes, [*Luke: That You May Know the Truth*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 81–82.

Beautiful Feet

Luke 2:8-15

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” ¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)

In those days, a shepherd was considered to be an unclean person. The life of the shepherd was somewhat different from today. The shepherds and their hired men would have lived most of their time outside. They would guide the animals to and fro throughout the region in search of fresh water and food. They would spend their time during the day watching over the flock and preparing a temporary sheepfold (if a permanent one was not available) to corral them during the night watch. During the nights, they would sleep in the entrance of those makeshift pens. They didn't care about how they looked or

smelled; they were people of the fields. God invited these very unpopular and unwanted people to be a part of the Greatest Story ever told.

Suddenly, **an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.** What beauty they must have seen! For that one moment, the veil was removed, and the least likely of all of the people in the region were able to see inside of the heavenly realm. At one single moment, the glory of the Lord shone around them. We have all seen some breathtaking sunsets and sunrises. We have all stood in awe as we have looked upon the wonder of God's creation, but all of these things would fail miserably in comparison to the glory of the Lord. Imagine everything that is good and right coming in a flash and overwhelming us in His grace and glory. These "robbers and thieves" were thrown into a complete fear.

The angels came with the good news. The Greek work Euangelizo is where we get the word Evangelize. The good news was that the long awaited Messiah had been born! They would be able to identify who He was by a sign, he would be **wrapped in swaddling cloths.** They were to look for a child wrapped in strips of cloths. These cloths were used to help keep the child warm and to keep the limbs straight. Finding a newborn in a city as small as Bethlehem would be a rare event, but even more so to find the Savior in a manger would have been a definite sign for them to find. It would seem logical that no one would have gone to Bethlehem while expecting a child, especially during a time in which the town would be overwhelmed with people. That is, unless the child should be born in Bethlehem.

The angel announced the content of the good news, which signaled a new era in how God relates to sinful humanity. The angel heralded the Savior. In that culture, people usually thought of "saviors" as those who claimed to heal or to

rescue from danger. Jesus would infuse the title with a much deeper meaning. He had come to save people from their sins (see also Matt. 1:21). Luke further identified Jesus as Messiah, the Lord. The translation “Messiah (or Christ) the Lord” emphasizes Jesus’ identity as both Messiah and Lord. The term “Messiah” meant “anointed one.” God chose (anointed) Jesus and set Him aside for a special purpose. Moreover, Jesus Himself was divine (the Lord).

If there was any doubt in the shepherds’ minds about what was going on, it must have been removed with the appearing of the multitude of the heavenly host. The word host signified an army from heaven present on earth. Think about this for a moment- The angelic armies were ready to go to war. However, they gave to mankind a message of peace. They worshiped the One God who revealed Himself in all His sovereign greatness to lowly, sinful human beings, and then they departed back into the heavenly realm. The Shepherds immediately expressed their eagerness to go to Bethlehem. They recognized the Lord as the source of the revelation they had received (vs 15). A sense of expectancy and urgency on the part of the shepherds is evident. Even though they had earthly responsibilities, these men knew they were experiencing something divine. We need to worship God with the same level of abandonment and expectancy.

You might be thinking that there is no way that God could love you. However, we can see in the text that God went to the unwanted people. Imagine if you will, the way these guys must have looked and smelled! They slept with the animals. In early writings it is found that a rabbi once taught that a good Jew would do well to keep his children from being shepherds because they were thieves. But God valued them enough to bring the angelic choir to proclaim the birth of Jesus to them. It was a private praise session that fell upon these

outcasts. These despised people saw the heavens erupt in praise to a holy God and a personal invitation to them to see the miraculous event.

These shepherds could have responded in numerous ways. They could have stayed there to take in more of the event. They could have been silent because no one would listen to them, let alone believe their story. However, God had something different planned. He wanted these outsiders to be on the inside seeing the greatest event in human history

How can we be more intentional about worshiping God for the birth of Jesus with our family, Christian friends, and non-Christian friends?

What things in your life are distracting you from delighting in Christ? How might you need to reevaluate your relationship with those things?

What are some ways to keep Jesus' sacrificial work- which began with His birth- central to your thinking as you go about your week?

Why is Jesus' birth Good News for everyone? What is Farmstead Baptist doing to help spread the news around the world? How are you helping, or how can you get involved?

What was the importance of the incarnation of Jesus? (The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)) How do we see Jesus dwelling among us today?

If you believe the Holy Spirit is alive in you as a follower of Jesus and His power is on display in and through you to this world, then how does that free you to live and what does it require of You?